

**Steffen Reichert.** *Unter Kontrolle: Die Martin-Luther-Universität und das Ministerium für Staatssicherheit 1968-1989.* 2 vols. Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 2007. 533 + 142 pp EUR 46.00, cloth, ISBN 978-3-89812-380-8.



**Reviewed by** Peter Barker

**Published on** H-German (November, 2009)

**Commissioned by** Susan R. Boettcher

This book is, to my knowledge, the first to provide a comprehensive picture of the way in which the German Democratic Republic's Ministry for State Security (MfS)--commonly known as the Stasi--controlled the structures and personnel in a major university in the GDR. Significant works have appeared on the Humboldt University in Berlin by Carlo Jordan and on the University of Jena by Gerhard Kluge and Reinhard Meinel, although the latter is more a collection of documents than a narrative. Discussion of MfS activities in universities has concentrated on personalities, such as Rector Heinrich Fink at the Humboldt, or has been included in general discussions of the role of the MfS in GDR society.[1] This work, in contrast, represents the most detailed account of the staff and structures at one university, the Martin-Luther-Universität (MLU) in Halle, and their involvement with the MfS. The author tries not only to demonstrate the level of involvement of staff and students with the MfS, but also to analyze the ways in which the latter controlled the structures of the university. His main aim is to

demonstrate that the MfS did not operate in isolation at the MLU but that its activities were coordinated with the SED and were subordinated to the goals of the latter.

The first volume analyzes different areas of MfS interaction with the university, in particular the relationship between the MfS and the central administration of the university, and demonstrates the MfS's determination to control the leading positions in the university, either by inserting its own officers and unofficial informers into leading positions, or by ensuring that they could influence and observe people in leading functions. The MfS not only cultivated a large network of informers and people in official positions who reported from the MLU--in the 1980s, the rough figure was five hundred--but also placed a number of full-time MfS officers in strategic administrative positions in the university. The most important of these acted as deputy to the rector for a large part of the period covered by this book. The crucial areas for the MfS were the central administration of the university; activities in partic-

ular subject areas such as theology and medicine; members of the university who were allowed to travel abroad (*Reisekader*), especially those allowed to travel to the West; and foreign staff and students. The latter two categories were particularly important targets, because universities were among the few institutions in the GDR allowed to carry on sustained relations with foreign institutions, a state of affairs that made them ideal platforms for the GDR's secret operations in the West. So, although MfS activities at MLU also included the usual range of activities, such as surveillance of undesirable individuals and activities, control of personnel decisions, and protection against penetration by foreign agencies, the espionage opportunities provided by staff members who had permission to travel abroad interested the MfS most.

The study begins with 1968 and reflects the rapid growth of the official personnel in Abteilung XX, the main MfS office, which was created in 1964 to defend the major institutions of the GDR against ideological subversion. 1968 was a crucial year for GDR universities, with the Third University Reform and its crucial dismantling of the traditional academic structures into sections (*Sektionen*). The tension caused by Warsaw Pact intervention in Czechoslovakia, particularly in intellectual circles, was also felt strongly in universities. Reichert demonstrates the clear increase in influence of the MfS at MLU through the 1970s and 1980s, a development that reflected its increased control over the administration and the increase in recruitment of informers. One of the most interesting sections in the book deals with 1989-90 and documents the difficulties that an institution such as a university had in dealing with fundamental political and organizational changes. Against the background of change and disruption, the university still had to keep its teaching and research programs going. Then, in the spring of 1990, the university confronted the problem of how to respond to revelations that more than twenty-five former Stasi officers had successfully

obtained posts at the university and that numerous members of the academic and administrative staff had been reporting to the MfS. The period up to 1993 was dominated by the evaluation of staff, a process that led to numerous conflicts, in particular with the pro-rectors, who had a background of involvement with the MfS. Their dismissal in 1991, along with two professors, represented the crucial stage in this process of renewal. Ultimately, however, fewer than fifty cases of staff accused of involvement with the MfS led to disputes that had to be settled in labor dispute tribunals.

The second volume contains a valuable list of archival sources, short biographies of the leading figures in the university, and a bibliography.

The sort of material included in this book is not surprising; indeed, any academic in the United States or Britain who had links with GDR academic institutions had to be aware that the MfS was a presence in any kind of contact, either with individual academics or with the structures of the university system. Researchers may justly wonder whether we need any more books on the MfS or whether this particular work gives us greater understanding of the role played by the MfS as the defender of SED power. The book provides concrete evidence of how the MfS played its role in one East German university and of the difficulties that could arise from involvement with GDR institutions. Its length and its wealth of detail make it, however, an unsuitable source for most undergraduate students, while its methodology and presentation also make it rather inaccessible for the general reader. It must, however, be of great interest for those readers who are interested in a case study that demonstrates the extensive penetration of the MfS into the everyday life of a university.

#### Note

[1]. See the recent collection of essays in Jens Gieseke, ed., *Staatssicherheit und Gesellschaft: Studien zum Herrschaftsaltag in der DDR* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007).

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at  
<https://networks.h-net.org/h-german>

**Citation:** Peter Barker. Review of Reichert, Steffen. *Unter Kontrolle: Die Martin-Luther-Universität und das Ministerium für Staatssicherheit 1968-1989*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. November, 2009.

**URL:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=25501>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No  
Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.